

Message Text

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15

ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8590

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DIA

CINCPAC HONOLULU

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 18462

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: THE SAWAT AFFAIR

REF: A) BANGKOK 18241; B. FBIS D220815Z NOV 74

BEGIN SUMMARY: A GROUP OF 66 NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) MEMBERS HAVE ACCEPTED FINANCE MINISTER SOMMAI HUNTRAKUN'S CHALLENGE TO SUBJECT HIM TO A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE AFTER THE DEBATE ON THE TRANSFER OF FORMER TREASURY CHIEF SAWAT UTHAIS. THE DEBATE IS SUPPOSED TO TAKE PLACE DECEMBER 6. ASSEMBLYMAN SAMAK SUNTHARAWET (DEMOCRAT PARTY), LEADER OF THE GROUP CALLING FOR THE DEBATE, STILL EXPECTS THE NLA TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF SOMMAI WHEN THE SHOW IS ALL OVER. END SUMMARY.

1. SAMAK SUNTHARAWET HAS TAKEN THE LEGISLATIVE LEAD

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FROM WIRAT KAMUTMAT AND ACCEPTED FINANCE MINISTER SOMMAI

HUNTRAKUN'S CHALLENGE FOR A DEBATE WITH A FINAL VOTE OF CONFIDENCE. SAMAK, LEADING A GROUP OF 66 ASSEMBLYMEN, SUBMITTED NOVEMBER 21 A NEW MOTION UNDER ARTICLE 159 OF THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH PROVIDES FOR A CONFIDENCE VOTE, AS OPPOSED TO ARTICLE 158 WHICH ALLOWS DEBATE BUT NO VOTE. SAMAK WANTS TO RESOLVE THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE TRANSFER OF FORMER TREASURY CHIEF SAWAT UTHAISI AS WELL AS GET TO THE BOTTOM OF SOMMAI'S CHARGES THAT SOME ASSEMBLYMEN ARE ACCEPTING BRIBES TO TRY TO OUST HIM.

2. THE NATION ON NOVEMBER 22 REPORTS (REF B) THAT THE MOTION INCLUDES SEVERAL POINTS FOR DEBATE:

A. DID THE CABINET AUTHORIZE SOMMAI'S ALLEGATIONS THAT SOME SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS AND PROVINCIAL DISTILLERS ARE DISTRIBUTING MONEY TO SOME ASSEMBLYMEN IN AN EFFORT TO OUST HIM?

B. IS THERE BRIBERY INVOLVED IN BIDDING FOR DISTILLERIES CONTRACTS?

C. IS SOMMAI'S TRANSFER OF SAWAT A POLITICAL INTRUSION INTO CIVIL SERVICE PREROGATIVES?

D. HAS SOMMAI FAILED TO MAINTAIN AN EFFECTIVE MONETARY POLICY AND THUS AVOID INFLATION?

3. SAMAK, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, BELIEVES SOMMAI WILL SURVIVE THE NO CONFIDENCE VOTE BECAUSE A MAJORITY OF ASSEMBLYMEN SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THAT THE DEBATE WILL CLEAR THE AIR. SOMMAI HIMSELF REPORTEDLY WELCOMES THIS NEW TURN OF EVENTS, BELIEVES SAMAK HAS DONE THE RIGHT THING, AND EXPECTS THE ASSEMBLY TO VOTE IN HIS FAVOR WHEN THE DEBATE IS OVER.

4. COMMENT: BOTH PROTAGONISTS IN THIS LATEST ASSEMBLY/ CABINET CONFRONTATION SEEM TO EXPECT AN AMICABLE RESOLUTION. THE OUTCOME DEPENDS, HOWEVER, ON HOW DEEPLY THE ASSEMBLYMEN PROBE, AND HOW CANDIDLY AND COMPLETELY SOMMAI RESPONDS. IF THE ASSEMBLY FORCES SOMMAI TO NAME NAMES, AND HE DOES SO, THE REVELATIONS COULD CAUSE REVERBERATIONS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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SCANDAL, WITHOUT HOWEVER NECESSARILY ENDANGERING SOMMAI'S CHANCES IN THE CONFIDENCE VOTE.

5. SOME OF THE KEY FIGURES IN THE ASSEMBLY, HOWEVER, MAY MERELY BE PLAYING POLITICS. SAMAK SUNTHARAWET IS A MEMBER OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY; WIRAT KAMUTMAT, WHO SUBMITTED THE ORIGINAL MOTION TO GRILL SOMMAI, IS A NEW FORCE PARTY CANDIDATE IN KHON KAEN PROVINCE. BOTH PARTIES ARE TRYING

TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF DETACHMENT FROM THE OLD POLITICAL SYSTEM AND COMMITMENT TO CLEAN GOVERNMENT, AS WELL AS SET PRECEDENTS FOR A STRONG LEGISLATURE. THE CURRENT PUBLIC "CONFRONTATION" SERVES ALL THESE PURPOSES.

6. WHATEVER THE ULTERIOR MOTIVES OF THE VARIOUS ACTORS IN THIS LATEST CONFRONTATION, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THEY ARE OF A NATURE AND SCOPE THAT WILL LEAD TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT - EVEN IN THE OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY THAT SOMMAI HIMSELF SHOULD LOSE THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE.
KINTNER

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